

BINGHAM AND BAKER.

TWO SPEECHES

OF

HON. CHARLES SUMNER,

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES,

10th and 11th December, 1861.

WASHINGTON, D. C.

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SPEECH.

*In Senate, December 10th, 1861, on the resolutions in honor of Mr. Bingham,
late Senator of Michigan.*

Mr. SUMNER spoke as follows:

Mr. President, there are Senators who knew Mr. BINGHAM well while he was a member of the other House. I knew him well only when he became a member of this body. Our seats here were side by side, and, as he was constant in attendance, I saw him daily. Our acquaintance soon became friendship, quickened by common sympathies, and confirmed by that bond which, according to the ancient historian, is found in the *idem sentire de republica*. In his death I have lost a friend; but the sorrow of friendship is deepened when I think of the loss to our country.

If he did not impress at once by personal appearance or voice or manner, yet all these, as we became familiar with them, testified constantly to the unaffected simplicity and integrity of his character. His life, so far as it was not given to his country, was devoted to the labors of agriculture. He was a farmer, and amidst all the temptations of an eminent public career, he never abandoned this vocation, which does so much to strengthen both body and soul. More than merchant, manufacturer, or lawyer, the agriculturist is independent in his condition. To him the sun and rain and the ever-varying changes of the seasons are agents of prosperity. Dependent upon nature, he learns to be independent of men. Such a person, thus endowed, easily turns away from the behests of party in order to follow those guiding principles which are kindred to the laws of nature. Of such a character our friend was a beautiful example.

In him all the private virtues commingled.

Truthful and frank, he was full of gentleness and generous sympathy. He had risen from humble fortunes, and his heart throbbed warmly for all who suffered in any way. Especially was he aroused against wrong and injustice wherever they appeared; and then all his softer sentiments were changed into an indomitable firmness—showing that he was one of those beautiful natures where—

“the gods had joined
The mildest manners and the bravest mind.”

It was this firmness which gave elevation to his public life. Though companions about him hesitated; though great men on whom he had leaned apostatized, he stood sure and true always for the Right. Such a person was naturally enlisted against Slavery. His virtuous soul recoiled from this many-headed Barbarism, which had entered into and possessed our National Government. His political philosophy was simply moral philosophy applied to public affairs. Slavery was wrong; therefore he was against it—wherever he could justly reach it—no matter what form it took—whether of pretension or blandishment. Whether stalking lordly like Satan, or sitting squat like a toad; whether cozening like Memphistopheles, or lurking like a poodle; whether searching as Asmodeus, even to lifting the roofs of the whole country, he saw it always, in all its various manifestations, as the Spirit of Evil, and was its constant enemy. And now, among the signs that Freedom has truly triumphed, is the fact that here, in this Chamber, so long the stronghold of Slavery, our homage can be freely offered to one who so fearlessly opposed it.

There was something in our modest friend which seemed especially adapted to private life. But had he not been a public man, he would have been in his own rural neighborhood at home one of those whose influence was positive for human improvement. He would have been among those to whose praise Clarkson has testified so authoritatively. "I have had occasion," says this philanthropist, "to know many thousand persons in the course of my travels, and I can truly say that the part that they took on this great question—of the abolition of the slave trade—was always a true criterion of their moral nature." But he was not allowed to continue in retirement. His country had need of him, and he became a member of the Michigan Legislature, and Speaker of its House—Representative in Congress—Governor—and then Senator of the United States. This distinguished career was stamped always by the simplicity of his character. The Roman Cato was not more simple or determined. He came into public life when Compromise was the order of the day, but he never yielded to it. He was a member of the Democratic party, which was the declared tool of Slavery, but he never allowed Slavery to make a tool of him. All this should now be spoken in his honor. To omit it on this occasion would be to forget those titles by which hereafter he will be most gratefully remembered.

There were two important questions, while he was a member of the other House, on which his name is recorded for Freedom. The first was on the famous proposition introduced by Mr. WILMOT, of Pennsylvania, for the prohibition of Slavery in the Territories. On this question he separated from his party, and always firmly voted in the affirmative. Had his voice at that time prevailed, Slavery would have been checked, and the vast Conspiracy under which we now suffer would have received an early death blow. The other question on which his record is so honorable was the Fugitive Slave Bill. There his name will be found among the NOES, in noble fellowship with PRESTON KING among the living, and HORACE MANN among the dead.

From that time forward his influence was felt in his own State for Freedom, and when, at a later day, he entered the Senate, he became known instantly as one of our surest and most faithful Senators, whose determined constancy was more eloquent for Freedom than a speech.

During all recent trials he never for one moment wavered. With the instincts of an honest statesman, he saw the situation, and accepted frankly and bravely the responsibilities of the hour. He set his face against concession in any degree and in every form. The time had come when Slavery was to be met, and he was ready. As the rebellion assumed its warlike proportions his perception of our duties was none the less clear. Slavery was, in his mind, the origin, and also the vital part, of the rebellion, and therefore it was to be attacked. Slavery was also the mainspring of the belligerent power now arrayed against the Union; therefore, in the name of the Union, it was to be overturned. While he valued the military arm as essential, he saw that without courageous counsels it would be feeble. The function of the statesman is higher than that of the general; and our departed Senator saw that on the counsels of the Government, even more than on its armies, rested the great responsibility of bringing this war to a speedy and triumphant close. Armies will obey orders, but it is for the Government to organize and to inspire victory. All this he saw plainly; and he longed impatiently for that voice—herald of Union and Peace—which, in behalf of a violated Constitution, and in the exercise of a just self-defence, should change the present contest from a bloody folly into a sure stage of Human Improvement and an immortal landmark of Civilization.

Such a Senator can be ill spared at this hour. His simple presence, his cheerful confidence, his genuine courage, his practical instincts, would help the great events which are now preparing; nay, which are at hand. But he still lives in his example, and speaks even from his tomb. By all who have shared his counsels here, he will always be truly remembered; while the State which trusted him so often in life, and the neighbors who knew him so well in his daily walks, will cherish his memory with affectionate pride. Marble and bronze will not be needed. If not enough for glory, he has done too much to be forgotten; and hereafter, when our country is fully redeemed, his name will be inscribed in that faithful company, who, through good report and evil report, have held fast to the truth:

"By fairy hands their knell is rung;
By forms unseen their dirge is sung;
There Honor comes, a pilgrim gray,
To bless the turf that wraps their clay;
And Freedom shall awhile repair
To dwell a weeping hermit there."

SPEECH.

*In Senate, December 11th, on the resolutions in honor of Mr. Baker,
late Senator of Oregon.*

[The President of the United States was in the Senate Chamber by the side of the Vice President during all the ceremonies of this day.]

Mr. SUMNER spoke as follows:

Mr. President, the Senator to whom we to-day say Farewell was generous in funeral homage to others. More than once he held great companies in rapt attention, while he did honor to the dead. Over the coffin of Broderick, he proclaimed the dying utterance of this early victim, and gave to it the fiery wings of his own eloquence. "They have killed me because I was opposed to the extension of slavery, and a corrupt Administration;" and as the impassioned orator repeated these words his own soul was knit in sympathy with the dead; and thus at once did he endear himself to the friends of Freedom, even at a distance.

"Who would not sing for Lucidas? He knew
Himself to sing and build the lofty rhyme."

There are two forms of eminent talent which are kindred in their effects, each producing an instant present impression; each holding crowds in suspense, and each kindling enthusiastic admiration; I mean the talent of the orator and the talent of the soldier. Each of these, when successful, wins immediate honor, and reads his praise in a nation's eyes. BAKER was orator and soldier. To him belongs the rare renown of this double character. Perhaps he carried into war something of the confidence inspired by the conscious sway of great multitudes, as he surely brought into speech something of the ardor of war. Call him, if you will, the Prince Rupert of battle; he was also the Prince Rupert of debate.

His success in life attests not only his own remarkable genius, but the benign hospitality

of our institutions. Born on a foreign soil, he was to our country only a step-son; but, were he now alive, I doubt not he would gratefully declare that the country was never to him an ungentle step-mother. The child of poverty, he was brought, while yet in tender years, to Philadelphia, where he began life an exile. His earliest days were passed in the loom rather than at school; and yet from this lowliness he achieved the highest posts of trust and honor; being at the same time Senator and General. It was the boast of Pericles in his funeral oration, at the Ceramicus, over the dead who had fallen in battle, that the Athenians were ready to communicate to all the advantages which they enjoyed; that they did not exclude the stranger from their walls; and that Athens was a city open to the Human Family. The same boast may be proudly repeated by us with better reason, as we commemorate our dead fallen in battle.

From Philadelphia the poor man's son was carried to the West, where he grew with the growth of that surprising region. He became one of its children; and his own manhood was closely associated with its powerful progress. The honors of the bar and of Congress soon were his; but his impatient temper led him from these paths into the Mexican war, where he gallantly took the place of Shields—torn with wounds and almost dead—at Cerro Gordo. But the great West, beginning to teem with population, did not satisfy his ambition, and he repaired to California. The child, whose infancy was rocked on the waves of the Atlantic, whose

manhood was formed in the broad and open expanse of the prairie, now sought a home on the shores of the Pacific, saying in the bouyant confidence of his nature—

"No pent up Utica contracts our powers;
But the whole boundless continent is ours."

There again his genius was promptly recognized. A new State, which had just taken a place in the Union, sent him as her Senator; and Oregon first became truly known to us on this floor by his eloquent lips.

In the Senate he at once took the place of orator. His voice was not full or sonorous; but it was sharp and clear. It was penetrating rather than commanding, and yet, when touched by his ardent nature, it became sympathetic and even musical. His countenance, body, and gesture all shared the unconscious inspiration of his voice, and he went on—master of his audience—master also of himself. All his faculties were completely at his command. Ideas, illustrations, words seemed to come unbidden, and to range themselves in harmonious forms—as in the walls of ancient Thebes each stone took its proper place of its own accord, moved only by the music of a lyre. His fame as a speaker was so peculiar even before he appeared among us, that it was sometimes supposed he might lack those solid powers without which the oratorical faculty itself can exercise only a transient influence. But his speech on this floor in reply to a slaveholding conspirator, now an open rebel, showed that his matter was as good as his manner, and that while he was a master of fence he was also a master of ordnance. His controversy was graceful, sharp, and flashing, like a cimeter; but his argument was powerful and sweeping like a battery.

You have not forgotten that speech. Perhaps the argument against the sophism of secession was never better arranged and combined, or more simply popularized for the general apprehension. A generation had passed since that traitorous absurdity—the fit cover of conspiracy—had been exposed. It had shrunk for awhile into darkness, driven back by the massive logic of Daniel Webster and the honest sense of Andrew Jackson.

"The times have been,
That when the brains were out the man would die,
And there an end; but now they rise again."

As the pretension showed itself anew, our orator undertook again to expose it. How thoroughly he did this, now with historic, and now

with forensic skill, while his whole effort was elevated by a charming, ever-ready eloquence, which itself was aroused to new power by the interruptions which he encountered—all this is present to your minds. That speech passed at once into the permanent literature of the country, while it gave to its author an assured position in this body.

Another speech showed him in a different character. It was his instant reply to the Kentucky Senator—not then expelled from this body. The occasion was peculiar. A Senator, with treason in his heart if not on his lips, had just taken his seat. Our lamented Senator, who had entered the Chamber direct from his camp, rose at once to reply. He began simply and calmly; but, as he proceeded, his fervid soul broke forth in words of surpassing power. As on the former occasion he had presented the well-ripened fruits of study, so now he spoke with the spontaneous utterance of his own natural and exuberant eloquence—meeting the polished traitor at every point with weapons keener and brighter than his own.

Not content with the brilliant opportunities of this Chamber, he accepted a commission in the Army, and vaulted from the Senate to the saddle—as he had already vaulted from Illinois to California. With a zeal that never tired, after recruiting men, drawn by the attraction of his name, in New York and Philadelphia, and elsewhere, he held his brigade in camp near the Capitol, so that he passed easily from one to the other, and thus alternated between the duties of a Senator and a General.

His latter career was short though shining. At a disastrous encounter near Ball's Bluff he fell, pierced by nine balls. That brain, which had been the seat and organ of such subtle power, swaying assemblies, and giving to this child of obscurity place and command among his fellow-men, was now rudely shattered, and that bosom which had throbbed so bravely was rent by numerous wounds. He died with his face to the foe; and he died so instantly that he passed without pain from the service of his country to the service of his God. It is sweet and becoming to die for one's country. Such a death, sudden but not unprepared for, is the crown of the patriot soldier's life.

But the question is painfully asked, who was the author of this tragedy, now filling the Senate Chamber, as it has already filled the coun-

try, with mourning? There is a strong desire to hold somebody responsible, where so many perished so unprofitably. But we need not appoint committees or study testimony in order to know precisely who took this precious life. That great criminal is easily detected—still erect and defiant without concealment or disguise. The guns, the balls, and the men that fired them are of little importance. It is the Power behind them all, saying, “the State, it is I,” which took this precious life; and this Power is Slavery. The nine balls which slew our departed brother came from Slavery. Every gaping wound of his slashed bosom testifies against Slavery. Every drop of his generous blood cries out from the ground against Slavery. The brain so rudely shattered, and the tongue so suddenly silenced in death, speak now with more than living eloquence against Slavery. To hold others responsible is to hold the dwarf agent and to dismiss the giant principal. Nor shall we do great service if we merely criticise some local blunder, while we leave untouched that fatal forbearance

through which the weakness of the rebellion is changed into strength, and the strength of our armies is changed into weakness.

Let not our grief to-day be a hollow-pageant; let it not expend itself in this funeral pomp. It must become a motive and an impulse to patriot action. But patriotism itself, that commanding charity, embracing so many other charities, is only a name, and nothing else, unless you resolve—calmly, plainly, solemnly—that Slavery—the barbarous enemy of our country—the irreconcilable foe of our Union—the violator of our Constitution—the disturber of our Peace—the vampire of our national life, sucking its best blood—the assassin of our children, and the murderer of our dead Senator, shall be struck down. And the way is easy. The just Avenger is at hand, with weapon of celestial temper. Let it be drawn. Until this is done, the patriot, discerning clearly the secret of our weakness, can only say sorrowfully—

—— “bleed, bleed, poor country;
Great tyranny, lay thou thy basis sure,
For goodness dares not check thee!”

